

Black Panthers vs. Police

The Rising Toll



Associated Press

Fred Hampton, slain Panther leader, addresses October rally with Dr. Spock.



MARK CLARK
... second Chicago victim



DAVID HILLIARD
... seized in San Francisco



United Press International

Police carry Hampton's body from Chicago apartment.

By Peter Osnos

Washington Post Staff Writer

"The police are the armed guardians of the social order. The blacks are the chief domestic victims of the American social order. A conflict of interest exists therefore between the blacks and police."

—Eldridge Cleaver in
"Soul On Ice."

At 4:45 a.m. last Thursday, Chicago policemen armed with a submachinegun, shotguns and revolvers arrived at the apartment of the local Black Panther leader in search of illegal weapons.

Minutes later, after a gun battle in which police said hundreds of shots were fired, two Panthers lay dead and four other occupants of the apartment wounded. Two police were slightly hurt—one by flying glass.

The incident was the fourth violent clash between Panthers and Chicago's police in just four months. Counting Thursday's casualties, 14 policemen have been injured, two killed; eight Panthers have been hurt and three are dead.

Elsewhere around the country, the toll for this year is not as bloody perhaps, but the pattern of repeated encounters between the young black militants and the law enforcement agencies is the same.

Hundreds of Panthers—including most of the group's top leaders—have been arrested, and many are in jail unable to post high bail or serving prison terms for felony convictions. Twenty-eight Panthers have died in police shootings since January, 1968, according to Charles Garry, San Francisco attorney and general counsel for the Panthers.

In New York alone, according to William Crain, a white lawyer who represents Black Panthers and other radicals, 100 Panthers have been arrested in the past year, the majority charged with serious crimes.

\$213,000 Total Bail

In Los Angeles, according to Masai Hewitt, the Panthers' minister of education and one of the highest ranking leaders still at large, members were required to put up \$213,000 in bail during the first six months of

1969—much of it in cash.

Tensions will heighten still further in the next few months with two major trials involving Panthers scheduled to take place.

Fourteen Panthers, including Bobby Seale, the organization's imprisoned national chairman, have been charged with murder and kidnaping in the death last spring of Alex Rackley, 24, of New York.

An extradition hearing on Seale will be held on Tuesday in California, where he is being held. He was recently given a four-year term for contempt of court arising out of his behavior during his trial in Chicago on conspiracy charges.

The second major trial will be in New York where 22 Panthers have been indicted on charges of conspiracy to bomb various buildings. Most of the defendants are in custody with bail set around \$100,000.

In an interview last week, Crain, the lawyer, said: "My firm represents many clients that are out of favor with the government: the SDS and others. But without any question at all, the pattern of harassment against the Panthers is greatest."

There is no doubt about the depth of official concern over the Black Panthers. Congressional and grand jury probes have taken place and the organization

has been singled out in statements by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as a particular menace.

In a report on "black extremists" last July, Hoover said, "of these, the Black Panther Party without question represents the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."

'Schooled' as Marxists

"Schooled in the Marxist-Leninst ideology and the teaching of the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tsetung," Hoover went on, "its members have perpetrated numerous assaults on police officers and have engaged in violent confrontations with police in cities throughout the country."

Several weeks later it was disclosed that the Justice Department had created a special task force to investigate Panther activities and see if they violate federal laws.

Included in the task force were representatives from Justice's civil rights, criminal and internal security di-

visions. A departmental spokesman refused yesterday to discuss any aspect of the group's work.

Other officials at Justice and the FBI denied that any coordinated national effort is under way to eliminate the Panthers with the cooperation of local and state police agencies.

Edward V. Hanrahan, Chicago's state's attorney and the man who authorized Thursday's raid, said in an interview, "If there's a drive on like that, I certainly don't know anything about it."

Hanrahan denied that he was conducting a war of his own on the Panthers. "I'm trying to protect our community from people who have sawed-off shotguns. On this occasion they turned out to be Black Panthers," he said.

Thursday's raid on the apartment of Fred Hampton, 21, the Panther's Illinois chairman, turned up one sawed-off shotgun, eight other shotguns, seven pistols and several hundred rounds of ammunition.

Hanrahan said a woman armed with a shotgun fired the first shot after police entered the apartment through front and rear doors. He said the police tried three times to stop the shooting.

But Bobby Rush, regarded as Hampton's heir apparent, told reporters that he had evidence the police had come to the apartment with "the intention of killing every one there."

'Search and Destroy'

To one reporter he commented, "the pigs undertook a search and destroy mission ... in their relentless plan to destroy the Black Panther Party." The next morning, police raided Rush's apartment, but Rush wasn't there. They seized an unregistered pistol and some ammunition.

Notwithstanding official denials, Rush's belief that a concerted government effort is taking place to wipe out the Panthers is shared by other of the group's national leaders.

Garry, a white lawyer who has the full confidence of all the Panthers, charged that "The Nixon administration, Attorney General Mitchell and others are out to commit genocide on the Black Panther Party."

Masai Hewitt, the Panther leader, said that none of the incidents involving police and Panthers are separate or isolated. "It's part of an overall plot . . . to keep true freedom from black people," he said.

Hewitt is a close associate of David Hilliard, 27, the Panther chief of staff, who was arrested in San Francisco Wednesday night for allegedly threatening the life of President Nixon in a Nov. 15 speech.

According to Hewitt, who spoke in a telephone interview from the Panthers' Berkeley, Calif., headquarters, what Hilliard said was "we will kill President Nixon, we will kill any (obscene) scoundrel in the way of our freedom."

"That's the way we talk in the ghetto," Hewitt said, "that is the vernacular, if we don't talk that way our people won't understand us, they wouldn't listen to us."

Violent History

From the time they were formed in 1966 after a series of conflicts between black youths and the Oakland, Calif., police, the Panthers have made no pretense about adhering to nonviolence.

Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther's self-exiled minister of information who fled imprisonment for a parole violation, once told a magazine interviewer, "I don't dig violence . . . guns are ugly.

"But there are two forms of violence: violence directed at you to keep you in your place and violence to defend yourself against that suppression and to win your freedom."

Lately, however, the Panther leadership has made an effort to purge itself of what Hewitt called "undesirable elements." In all, said the Panther leader, almost 1,000 people have been dropped.

Garry, the Panthers' lawyer, said that "illegal conduct, use of drugs, use of alcohol or adventurism" were grounds for dismissal from the party.

"We are not a mass organization," Hewitt said, "we're a vanguard."

Hewitt estimated that there are 50 functioning Panther branches in about 30 states. He refused to give a membership figure, quoting Malcolm X, "those who know don't tell; those who

tell don't know."

Others have estimated the number of Panthers at between 1,200 and 5,000. But a source familiar with Panther activities said they could command the support at rallies, for example, of many times that number.

One of the Panthers purged is alleged by police to have been the murdered Alex Rackley, who was found bruised, burned and bullet-ridden in a shallow Connecticut river bed last April 21. Police say Rackley was suspected of being an informer.

The search for suspects in the Rackley case led to a series of FBI raids over several months on Panther headquarters in cities like Denver, Washington and Salt Lake City. Fourteen persons, including two juveniles, were charged.

Pre-trial hearings have

begun in a heavily guarded New Haven courtroom where the court has heard tape recordings which the prosecution contends contain the voice of Rackley being tortured. The judge is considering whether four female and one male defendant should be granted bail.

According to Crain, a New York judge has refused to lower the bail on the defendants being held in the bombing conspiracy case. The lawyer said the same judge had recently cut the bail of three white persons charged with actual bombing.

"What could be a more clear instance of racial harassment?" he asked.

The pressure on the Panthers has taken its toll on the group's activities, which were never a great deal more than publishing a newspaper and providing breakfast for schoolchildren in large cities. (Breakfasts

were accompanied with helpings of Panther philosophy.)

Still, Panther supporters say the group will carry on. "They're not scared," said Garry, "because they expected this to happen. They have been put upon for years and this is just part of it."